SERIAL STORY

Lavender Creighton's Lovers

By OLIVIA B. STROHM

CHAPTER XXVI.—CONTINUED.

His words and manner, coming so soon after Lavender's confession, let in a flood of light on Winslow's brain. This, then, was the "somebody else." Because of this man, with his cruel smile and reckless, debonair manner, she had "no right to love him." No right to love him—Winslow, to whom the day was more splendid, the night more blest because with them came thought and dreams of her!

The sudden suspicion made him stagger for a moment, and as if to add fuel to his pent-up rage, the Spaniard commented further with a sidelong look in his direction. "It is, of course, a great joy that you are safe—even under the circumstances—but, well, the only trouble is, that our friend, the schoolmaster here, appears to think the end justifies the means, and naturally, an indignant brother would not agree with him."

With fury which jealousy, alone, could have kindled in him to so white a heat Winslow turned to the crowd, and called in a loud voice: "One moment—let me have your attention, friends."

Most of the party had dismounted, and now stood in groups idly amused, and only slightly interested in the proceedings. The girl they had come in search of, was safe—they were ready to go home—why this delay? Nevertheless, they all paid strict attention to Winslow, who turned to them with blazing, eloquent eyes.

"Friends, in behalf of this young lady, and of my own honor—which is almost as dear—I want to tell you how I found her, and why I presumed to start on the search. Don't you remember that I said I might go, but if so, it would be alone?"

[illegible] the burly Tobias Judson, who had urged Winslow to start with them from the tavern, came good-naturedly forward. "Thet you did, Pardner, and ef we hadn't a ben so d—d smart, we'd a-known ye was goin'."

"Just so, sir, thank you. I received a hint which was left me by my servant, with one whom I am not at liberty to mention. As man to man, I assure you that I went forth groping, except for that slight clew. It led me to the hut, a temporary shelter of a friend of Owatoga's. One with whom she had been safe, one of whom you have all heard. Ask Daniel Boone to tell Miss Creighton's story. Ask him whether or not the schoolmaster is a gentleman."

The name of Boone acted like magic, and the popular tide was at once turned in the speaker's favor. It was known that the pioneer was even then on a sojourn in his beloved wilderness. What more natural than that things had happened as the schoolmaster had said Besides, it was a matter easily proven, and of this—constituting himself Winslow's champion, Tobias reminded the crowd. "We all know Dan Boone, and we all know Charlie Winslow. 'Tain't much of a risk to trust a woman with either of 'em; eh, boys?"

There were cries of "It's all right;" "Come on;" three cheers for the schoolmaster."

There were cheers for Lavender, too, while she gave her hand to some of the least bashful, a word of thanks to all, and, smiling, stood alone in the center of the road waving adieux until the party were out of sight.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Together, silent, in darkness and without a fire, Daniel Boone and Owatoga sat listening—conscious of danger, alert, but unafraid. Their hiding-place was sheltered, but no spot was proof against the brand or bullet, and the Indians were on their track. Owatoga had reconnoitered, and in the early dusk, himself undiscovered—had come upon a group of them in secret council. They knew this was the right trail—they would follow it with all cunning and persistence; they would not abandon the quarry now almost lured.

Daniel Boone received the news in silence; finally he glanced up from his carving to say: "Daniel Boone has tired them out before; he can do it again. We are together this time, Owatoga; we can stand it as long as they can."

He resumed his work, and quiet reigned. One by one the stars came out, until across the zenith shone long arcs of light, forming a bridge above their heads with the giant pines for pillars. On a sudden the quiet was broken—the sounds were faint at first, then louder and louder, until to their ears was plainly borne the noise of men in fight. The crack of rifles, the tumult of voices, all the indistinguishable sounds which, in their very vagueness, carry so much of sinister import.

Boone and the Indian stood erect, their rifles directed towards the opening in the grove. They exchanged not a word. Neither was given to speech—both knew how to wait. The din sounded nearer, and then ceased as suddenly as it commenced. There was a sound of men in retreat, which distance quickly stifled, then all was still.

But the quiet was brief. Again voices were heard, but this time there was no clamor, no note of alarm. Only muttered sounds, and scraps of disjointed talk. The speakers drew nearer to where the watchers peered into the dark. At last a white something fluttered in the trees, and cheery halloos sounded.

"A truce!" and slowly Boone's rifle dropped.

Then a familiar voice reached Owatoga's ears; a tone which awakened response in the stoical breast, and his gun, too, fell at his side. "Owatoga, it is I, Winslow."

There were shouts of greeting, and torches waved above the heads of a band of men who came slowly forward, a search party of the villagers led by Winslow.

In their midst they carried a litter, whereon lay a man, face downward, as if to hide from even the pitying gaze of the stars. Two or three others limped along, groaning, between their companions. Confusion followed, and in the excitement, one fact alone was clear. The relief party, with Rev. Luke at its head, had come, without warning, upon the besiegers, and routed them after a sharp fight. To each man, in his version of the fray, Boone lent ears willing, yet tingling with discontent that he could know of it but as a tale rehearsed.

"I thank you all from the bottom of this old heart," he said. "My heart, which leaps yet at thought of this night's danger. 'Tis the worst of old age, that we must let others do for us; that others must risk their lives for ours—ours, that are not worth the trouble," he ended, bitterly.

He moved to the litter that had been placed near a new-built fire. The sufferer's head was swathed in a rude bandage, but as Boone approached, the

"IT'S ODDS EF HE RALLIES ENOUGH TO CURSE THE BULLET THET PUT HIM THERE."

eyes opened—eyes large, glittering and dark as the night which, for them, no more could star nor fire make bright.

One of those who bent above him rose and said aside to Boone: "He hain't long to linger. He was shot by one o' the red spawn o' hell, and it's odds ef he rallies enough to curse the bullet that put him there."

Boone bent over the pallet until his white hair swept the raven locks of him who lay there. "You came to save me," he whispered, "and yet you lie here. God forgive me!"

A tear dropped upon the dying man's cheek, warming it, and sending through his frame a renewed thrill. "I want to live—to live—for her," he gasped. "Tell them to take me back. I must not die away from her."

He choked for a moment, then: "Send the holy man, the priest."

Boone beckoned to Rev. Luke, who came to the side of the litter.

Gonzaga murmured: "I want to go back; I can't die here, there are too many trees," and he moved his head uneasily from side to side. "My soul could not find the way out." Then, stretching out his hand, feebly: "Take me back to her. I can't die here, alone."

The preacher could find no words for this man whose ebbing life held but one wish, and who wanted nothing beyond.

"We will take you soon, my poor friend, but wait—you are too weak, rest here."

Gonzaga retorted, huskily, weakly, but with a touch of his old defiance: "'Rest?' Yes, rest forever with no word nor look to carry to my grave! I must have both, I tell you, both word and look—from her." His voice rose to a shrill wail at the last words.

In vain the preacher tried to calm him, arguing that they would go when he was stronger, when he could more safely travel.

The sick man would not listen. "It's your fault that I am here; you would not let me kill him" (and he glanced about as if looking for some one). "You led me into this to-night, instead. Now make amends to me; bring me back—take me home—to her."

Winslow, from his stand in shadow, heard the last words. But he checked the impulse to go nearer; to look down in strength upon that weakness would be unmanly. Whatever his motives, it would only seem mockery to the prostrate rival.

But aside to the others he urged immediate return. No less, he said, to gratify the whim of a dying man, than because there was danger in delay. The Indians might, at any moment, spring upon them reenforced.

Boone and Rev. Ballinger concurred in this, but it was not easy to convince the rest. Already the tired men were disposed, some asleep by the fire, others chatting over a friendly bottle, all settled for the night with the care-free enjoyment only such men could know. But the Scriptural eloquence of the preacher, added to Winslow's personal popularity and the strong influence of Boone, prevailed, and with the first hint of daylight the party set forth.

In the primitive wagon, with its sides screened by flapping curtains of deerskin, which had been left where the trail entered the woods, they placed the wounded Gonzaga. And Daniel Boone trudged along with the rest, grateful for his rescue, but sad and silent—drinking of the bitter cup which age holds to every lip—the draught of helpless dependence upon the unconscious condescension of youth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

At the spinning wheel just within the door of the tavern sat Belle, the octoroon, humming an old song as her foot rose and fell in time to the treadle.

There was a step upon the path, and soft skirts brushed the shrubbery, but, intent upon the flax which her deft fingers guided from distaff to flyer, the spinner heard nothing until a voice at her side called: "Good afternoon, Belle; it is a pity to interrupt you. I see you improve each shining hour."

The woman jumped with alacrity to greet Lavender, and, bringing a chair, said: "I'm honored, sure enough, Miss Creighton, and the wheel can wait."

Gracefully dropping to the seat, Lavender placed a large basket on the ground, and waved her big hat across her face, rosy from brow to chin with the midday heat.

"It was very warm on the road, but how cool and nice under this trellis."

She picked a blossom of the cucumber vine that grew above, and the stir of leaves brought a feathery shower about her, all fragrant green and white.

"Yes'm, it's real nice. Mr. Winslow fixed the vines so's it would be shady."

"It was good of him to take the trouble." Then, looking directly into the octoroon's eyes, Lavender went on: "It was about Mr. Winslow that I wanted to speak to you to-day."

The quick smile, the evident pleasure in her listener's every feature, was reward enough for the condescension. "About him? About Mr. Winslow?"

"Yes, I had to come to town to-day to do some trading, and I wanted to see you, too. I am anxious to know if Mr. Winslow and Senor Gonzaga went on the relief expedition in aid of Col. Boone?"

The octoroon said yes, and remained silent.

Nothing more was said for a moment. Lavender was having a fierce battle with her pride.

Should she ask questions of this woman? Should she reveal to her interest in things which her inmost heart should keep sacred? Yet, after all, it was little to ask; if possible she would be spared further torture of suspense.

So she said, abruptly: "It has always seemed strange to me that Mr. Winslow came here so suddenly—in so mysterious a way."

Then, as the woman opened her mouth to speak, "I know, of course, that he came in response to this note. But you did not write it: I wonder who did?"

She placed in the woman's hand the yellow envelope.

The octoroon shook her head. "No'm; but it was somebody who knew he'd get into trouble if he went to that pollard willow where Sue Miller was to meet her—her beau." The name which trembled on her lips was not uttered, as quick came the recollection that she must be silent.

But to her amazement Lavender supplied it. "Yes, I know," she said (for at last rumor had brought to her ears something of the story of Gerald's intimacy with Sue Miller). "I know; to meet my brother. But who could have wanted Mr. Winslow there?"

"That I don't know, least it was some enemy who thought he'd get into trouble. The branch-water man had threatened to kill your—Mr. Gerald, and so anybody around there in the dark was likely to—"

But Lavender interrupted with a sharp cry: "No, no; it could not have been that. He—Mr. Winslow—has no enemy who would be so—so guilty."

She spoke with a touch of hauteur which subdued the woman. She argued now, instead: "Well, maybe it was somebody who wanted you to think Mr. Winslow was in love with Sue. That wouldn't have been so bad," she concluded, for she saw that for the first motive the young woman had no temper.

"No, n—, that wouldn't have been so bad," Lavender repeated, half to herself.

But the sickening suspicion overcame her, and she sank to the seat and rested her hot cheek against the soft, cool vine.

At that moment there was a sound of muffled voices, and down the road a film of sandy dust whitened the trees.

"They have come back," and, united in their common anxiety, the maid and woman rushed out awaiting the procession.

It was coming slowly. Lavender's heart stood still to see how slowly.

A dozen or more men trudged behind the unwieldy vehicle, which seemed to crawl after the jaded mules. At last the girl's strained eyes alighted upon a straight figure, walking sturdily and unharmed by its side. Overpowered by the relief which sight of Winslow brought, and shamed at excess of it, Lavender leaned against the wooden block, hands clasped and color mounting until her cheeks outflamed the salvia that edged the way with a hem of scarlet.

Owatoga hurried in advance, and strode to her side without a word, but with a variety of emotions wrinkling his usually impassive face.

With a smile of greeting Lavender asked: "You left Col. Boone, and is he safe?"

"He is safe—at home," the Indian responded.

Then, with an inscrutable look and gesture toward the covered wagon, he added: "And the white maid is safe—now."

Without further explanation, he passed on down the road.

By this time the procession was halted near the tavern, and the crowd dispersed—mostly within the hostelry. The octoroon had only time for a hearty word for Charles, when she hurried within where her duties as hostess were eagerly sought by the thirsty travelers.

Meanwhile, to Lavender's surprise, there was a constraint, a sadness in the response which Winslow and the preacher made to her congratulations. Charles bent so low that his breath swept her hand, and in his eyes was a fond greeting, but he glanced uneasily toward the covered wagon, where Rev. Ballinger stood with lowered eyes, holding the curtains close, as if on guard over something within.

Nobody spoke, and the silence filled Lavender with a vague alarm. She had noted the absence of Gonzaga. A sharp suspicion seized her. "Is somebody inside the wagon?" she demanded.

Sudden, shrill from behind the curtains came the answer: "I am waiting. Where is she?"

The voice, familiar, yet so weak, so unlike its natural tone of command, made her numb with dread. But pity was stronger, and she rushed to the wagon, and pulled aside the curtain. Then over the dying man she bent with a face pale, but more than ever beautiful in compassion.

[To Be Continued.]

A Bright, Successful Boy.

A resident of Madison, Ind., said of the boyhood of David Graham Phillips, the novelist:

"Phillips was a quick, bright boy, eminently a successful boy. What he wanted he got always, and he only wanted sane things, things that were good for him.

"One day, having one cent and being hungry, he decided to buy with it—not foolish, frivolous candy—but a piece of cheese.

"Accordingly, he walked into a grocery, threw down his coin, and said:

"'A cent's worth of cheese, please.'

"The grocer smiled.

"'We can't make a cent's worth, sonny,' he said.

"'What's the smallest you can make?' asked little David Graham Phillips.

"'Two cents' worth,' said the grocer, and he cut off that quantity.

"'Now, I'll show you,' said the boy, 'how in future you may make one cents' worth.'

"And he took up the cheese knife, cut the two cent piece in half, pointed to his copper, and walked out, munching calmly."—Chicago Inter Ocean.

Retired.

"Does Dolly give her husband as much of her love as formerly?"

"Well, no—she has retired him on a 'pension,' so to speak."—Town Topics.

Then He Doesn't Hurry.

A wise lawyer hesitates to express an opinion in any case until he learns which side is going to offer him a retainer.

DRIVEN TO GET RELIGION.

Reason for Close-Fisted Man's Attendance at Church.

A New Hampshire man tells of a tight-fisted man of affairs in a town of that state, who until recently had never been observed to take an interest in church matters. Suddenly, however, he became a regular attendant at Divine service, greatly to the astonishment of his fellow townsmen.

"What do you think of the case of old Ketchum?" said one of the business men of the place to a friend. "Is it true that he has got religion?"

"Well, hardly," replied the other, with the air of one who knows. "The fact is, it's entirely a matter of business with him. I am in a position to know that about a year ago he loaned the pastor $50, which the latter was unable to pay. So there remained nothing for Ketchum but to take it out in pew rent."—The Sunday Magazine.